

Gorbo Goes Out of Fashion In Washington

So much for "nostalgia for the Cold War." Remember that line? Only last summer, Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell used it to blister George Bush for too much "timidity" in assisting Mikhail Gorbachev. Most of Washington nodded approvingly.

What a difference Lithuania makes. Now Sen. Mitchell wants the president to do more "to express disapproval and to deter further actions" against Lithuania. He modestly suggests slowing down trade talks. Another Senate Democrat, Maryland's Barbara Mikulski, feels "mounting outrage and frustration" that Mr. Bush hasn't been tougher with Moscow. Florida Rep. Dante Fascell, also not renowned as a hawk, wants Mr. Bush to postpone the May 30 summit with the Soviet leader.

Who knows, if this keeps up Congress will soon ask Bob Gates, the deputy national security adviser, to give that famous "hard-line" speech that Secretary of State Baker nixed last year.

What's going on? Are we all hard-liners now? No, but the Washington romance with Mikhail Gorbachev is certainly cooling. Few are yet prepared to end the affair, but everyone's maneuvering in case there is a breakup. At the very least, ev-

Potomac Watch

By Paul A. Gigot

Everyone now agrees that Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney was right all along. Mr. Cheney was roundly booed last year when he said Mr. Gorbachev probably can't long survive. Now it's hard to find anyone who disagrees. That's more or less the private consensus of President Bush's own Sovietologists and the intelligence community. The argument now is that the U.S. mustn't challenge Mr. Gorbachev on Lithuania precisely because he is so vulnerable. Yesterday in Moscow, a Lithuanian man set himself on fire.

The CIA came up to Capitol Hill last Friday, gave a dire report on the Soviet economy and no one objected. But Langley's lament was cheery compared with the 17 Soviet economists brought to Washington by Nick Eberstadt for the American Enterprise Institute. They described an economy about half the size the CIA has long calculated, a military burden about twice as large, and living standards somewhere south of Brazil's. A chain-smoking People's Deputy, Vladimir Tikhonov, called the situation hopeless without immediate and radical reform. No one said he was exaggerating.

If nothing else, this new realism solves Mr. Bush's Who-lost-Gorbachev problem. The precedent here is Panama. Mr. Bush's agonizing delay in acting against Manuel Noriega had even Democrats urging him to foment a coup. By the time he did invade, even Yankee-stay-home types were applauding U.S. intervention in another nation's affairs. By his caution now toward Lithuania, Mr. Bush has ensured that if he does ever impose sanctions and relations with Mr. Gorbachev go sour, he'll have plenty of accomplices.

The risk now is that he's embraced Mr. Gorbachev too much. Some conservatives have already fixed on the appeasement metaphor. Vytautas Landsbergis, the valiant Lithuanian president, even said about the West this week, "This is Munich." But the analogy is false. Mr. Gorbachev isn't expanding his empire, like Hitler, but is resisting its contraction.

If it's a Teutonic analogy we want, the better one may be Metternich. Lithuania has exposed, more than ever, the roots of Bush administration foreign policy in national-interest realism—the cold-blooded calculation of "interests" and power. Those roots exist, as they must, in every administration. But they're more prominent now than at any time since Henry Kissinger was introducing *realpolitik* to U.S. dictionaries. (Mr. Kissinger once wrote a book about Metternich, the 19th-century realpolitician who resisted his own era's movements for self-determination.)

Under Presidents Carter and Reagan, realism was wrapped in a broader and rhetorical idealism. Mr. Carter had human rights, Mr. Reagan a campaign for democracy and free markets. George Bush offers mainly "stability" and world "realities." It's partly a problem of rhetoric, but the rhetorical failure makes it also seem a failure to sympathize with Balts and Chinese pursuing American ideals.

Even when the arguments have merit, as they do with Lithuania, it's doubtful they can prevail over time unlinked to broader American principles. Americans have a moral streak and little patience



with *realpolitik*. Mr. Bush's China policy has already withered under attack. Yesterday his detente with Iraq's Saddam Hussein, who has threatened to use chemical weapons against Israel, was assailed in Congress as "Alice in Wonderland."

Some of the younger Bush officials appear to understand this vulnerability. A month ago Mr. Baker was set to deliver what was advertised as a major speech on democracy as a goal and tool of U.S. foreign policy. Some officials lobbied to include the dread word, "Lithuania." But the White House said no, lest it somehow offend Mr. Gorbachev. Not surprisingly, the speech wasn't taken seriously.

Mr. Bush says the polls support him on Lithuania. But as the president might also say, polls are fickle things. China was a tolerable tyranny—until TV cameras showed us Tiananmen Square. More scenes like yesterday's of Balts burning themselves in Moscow could change American opinion, just as Buddhists once did in Saigon.

Democrats would like nothing better than to get to the right of George Bush on the world's aspirations for liberty. If we've learned anything about George Mitchell, it's that he is a flexible critic.